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ABSTRACT

Based on Jonathan Swift's novel "Gulliver's Travels," this lesson plan presents activities designed to help students understand that Swift comments on undesirable outcomes of advances in science; and other authors have also warned against abuse of science. The main activity of the lesson involves students developing a poster illustrating views of science and society. It includes objectives, materials, procedures, adaptations, discussion questions, evaluation methods, extension activities, annotations of suggested readings and web links, vocabulary, and related academic standards and benchmarks addressed in the lesson plan. The lesson plan also contains a description of a video clip related to the lesson, comprehension questions related to the video clip, and answers to those comprehension questions. (RS)

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TITLE OF LESSON PLAN:

Gulliver's Travels

LENGTH OF LESSON: Two class periods

GRADE LEVEL: 9-12

SUBJECT AREA: Literature

CREDIT: Kirsten Rooks and Mary McLean.

OBJECTIVES: Students will understand the following:

1. Jonathan Swift comments on undesirable outcomes of advances in science.

2. Other authors have also warned against abuse of science.

MATERIALS:
For this lesson, you will need:

- Poster or display board
- Markers for writing on poster or display board
- Glue, paste, or tape
- Biographical reference works about writers

PROCEDURE:

1. If students have read any of the following novels or other works of fiction in which authors warn against the abuse of science, as Swift does in *Gulliver's Travels*, this activity can help consolidate thinking about authors' views of science and society. If students have not yet read any of the following novels, consider introducing one or more as in-class or outside reading after students finish *Gulliver's Travels*.

- *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley
- *1984* by George Orwell
- *The Time Machine* by H. G. Wells
- *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* by Jules Verne

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2. Tell students to relate one of the preceding novels to *Gulliver's Travels* by identifying within it at least three passages in which the author voices warnings—implicit or explicit—about the misuse of science. Then students should determine if each such passage is an intentional exaggeration by the author or a reality-based prediction of what the future will bring (or has already brought).

3. Students should then move beyond the novel they are writing about and conduct research on its author, recording events in his or her life that could have contributed to his or her views on the effect of science on society.

4. When the research is complete, students should present their work to the class in a poster session. Among the information students should include on their posters is the following:

- title of poster (*not* to be mixed up with the title of novel under study)
- clear identification of the author and novel under study
- images of the author and book
- copies of passages that illuminate the author's view of how science affects human society
- comment by student on each of the passages
- an analysis of events or influences in author's life leading to his or her views on science and society
- a concluding evaluation by student assessing validity of author's stance on science and society

5. The final element on each poster should lead to a lively discussion by students about the benefits and costs to society of scientific progress.

6. Display the posters in your classroom or in a part of the school building to which students in other classes and grades have regular access.

ADAPTATIONS:

Instead of assigning a second novel to students as a supplement to *Gulliver's Travels,* ask students to read one of the following short stories or another story that comments on questionable effects of science on society. Ask students to cite at least one passage that makes such a comment.

- "Flowers for Algernon," by Daniel Keyes
- "The Fun They Had," by Isaac Asimov
- "The Flying Machine," by Ray Bradbury
- "Harrison Bergeron," by Kurt Vonnegut
- "By the Waters of Babylon," by Stephen Vincent Benét

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is satire? What makes it an effective form of criticism?

2. In Gulliver's Travels, Jonathan Swift examines the essence of human nature; are humans basically rational and good beings or impulsive and cruel beasts? What does Gulliver discover about human nature? Draw your own conclusion to this question and support it with examples from personal or current events.

3. What, if anything, should be free from attack by satire?

4. Discuss what is accomplished in the story by changing the size of Gulliver and the people he interacts with. How does this change of scale affect Gulliver's experiences and his relationships?

5. What were Jonathan Swift's views on science and technology? Today, we tend to view science and technology as good and useful things, though this is not always the case. Discuss ways in which science and technology have harmed people or detracted from society in general.

6. What do you believe Jonathan Swift was trying to say regarding society, politics, science and technology, and social institutions of his day? Do you think he would be more or less pleased with our modern institutions? Of what aspects of these modern institutions do you think he would particularly approve or disapprove?

EVALUATION:

You may evaluate each student's poster using the following three-point rubric:

Three points: complete information as specified in the Procedures section; no errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

Two points: most information as specified in Procedures; some errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

One point: some information as specified in Procedures; many errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics

You can ask your students to contribute to the assessment rubric by determining criteria for clarity and readability of posters.

EXTENSION:

Swift in the Twenty-first Century
What would Swift think of life in this century? As a class project, have students compile a list of twenty-first-century developments that might be targets of the writer's satire if Swift were alive today. Each student can choose one of the developments on the list and write a satirical essay or story about it. Before students start on this writing project, review the features of satire, and decide on a suitable length for the essays and stories.

A Cartoon Collection
Political cartoons have been for centuries a common and effective form of satire. As a class, discuss the usefulness and appeal of political cartoons. Then have each student collect three political cartoons from current and old newspapers and magazines. Each student should write an analysis of the issue being satirized and the cartoonist's take on the issue. For class presentation, have each student select one of his or her analyzed cartoons, orally describe it to the class, and explain why "a picture is worth a thousand words."

SUGGESTED READINGS:

The Tale Bearers: Literary Essays
V.S. Pritchett. Random House, 1981.
The author of these classic essays on major English and American writers is himself a world-famous English writer. Here he discusses the relationship between a writer's work and his life and times. Read his personal comments on Swift as well as Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad, E.M. Forster, Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, Henry James, Saul Bellow, Samuel Pepys, and others. He sees Swift as a man of his time, whose daily life can be seen in his writings.

Gulliver's Travels: The Politics of Satire
Ronald Knowles, Twaynes Masterwork Studies / Robert Lecker, general editor. Twayne Publishers/Prentice Hall International, 1996.
Did you know that Swift left money to establish a hospital for the insane upon his death? This biography of Swift's life and times says we do not have to answer the question of whether Gulliver's Travels is a novel or a satire. It is both novel and satire as well as an account of travel, realism, fantasy, and fable.

WEB LINKS:

Gulliver's Travels by Project Gutenberg
A public domain copy of the e-text of *Gulliver's Travels* is available for downloading.
http://promo.net/pg/_titles/G.html

Gulliver's Travels
Edited text, timeline, illustrations, and lots of Gulliver links. A great site to begin the study.
http://www.jaffebros.com/lee/gulliver

Ocean Plant: Interdisciplinary Marine Science Activities
When studying Gulliver, you may be lost with the language that is "salted" with words derived from the sea. This site will help enhance the study with lesson plans, resources, etc.
http://educate.si.edu/lessons/currkits/ocean/reflect/essay.html

The Art Teacher Connection
Great site for ideas for incorporating art into a literature unit!
http://www.primenet.com/~arted

Geometry and Gulliver's Travels
Discussion site with ideas for incorporating geometry into the study for teachers using UCSMP geometry texts.
http://forum.swarthmore.edu/~sarah/HTML.threads/articletocs/

Gulliver's Travels Lesson One
Essay and discussion topics here that would be useful in the study of Swift.
http://www.dce.ttu.edu/dl/courses/engl2302/en230201.htm

VOCABULARY:

abstraction
An idea that is theoretical, rather than practical or factual.
Context:
It is abstraction that Swift is against. He associates abstraction with science.

bizarre
Extremely unconventional or eccentric.
Context:
In Gulliver's Travels, Swift takes the reader on four bizarre journeys.

nepotism
Favoritism, such as in the appointment to a job, by those in office toward members of their own family.
Context:
There exists a political situation that is based on nepotism, favoritism, flattery, and corruption.

perspective
A point of view or an idea of the relative importance of one thing to another and their true relationship.
Context:
Throughout the voyage, Swift radically plays with our sense of perspective, forcing us to reexamine our own nature.

satirist
Someone who uses stinging wit, humor, or irony to attack folly or human vices.
Context:
Swift was the greatest satirist in the English language.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS:

Grade Level: 6-8, 9-12

Subject Area: literature

Standard: Demonstrates competence in applying the reading process to specific types of literary texts.

Benchmarks:
(6-8) Knows the defining characteristics of a variety of literary forms and genres (e.g., fiction, nonfiction, myths, poems, fantasies, biographies, autobiographies, science fiction, tall tales, supernatural tales).

(9-12) Independently applies the reading process and strategies to satires and parodies that are of substantial length. Understands the defining features and structure of satires and parodies.

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: literature

Standard: Demonstrates a familiarity with selected literary works of enduring quality.

Benchmarks:
Demonstrates an understanding of why certain literary works are considered classics or works of enduring quality and substance. Demonstrates a familiarity with a variety of classic American, British, and world literature and their authors.

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: literature

Standard: Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading literature.

Benchmarks: Makes abstract connections between his or her own life and the characters, events, motives, and causes of conflict in texts.

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: behavioral studies

Standard: Understands the various meanings of a social group, the general implications of group membership, and the different ways that groups function.

Benchmarks:
Understands that group identity may create a feeling of superiority, which increases group cohesion but may also occasion hostility toward and/or from other groups.
Understands that social groups may have patterns of behavior, values, beliefs, and attitudes that can help or hinder cross-cultural understanding

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Video Information and Comprehension Questions

Video Description
England in the 18th century was a country ripe with social ironies, and Jonathan Swift mined them all to give bite to this fantastic narrative. Discover how Swift's prickly prose remains on-target even today.

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Download Comprehension Questions & Answers ⓟ

The Comprehension Questions are available to download as an RTF file. You can save the file to your desktop and open it in a word processing program.

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TITLE OF VIDEO:
Gulliver's Travels

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why is the period in which Jonathan Swift wrote called "The Age of Reason?"

2. What was Jonathan Swift's position on the question of the essence of human nature?

3. Why has Gulliver's Travels proved so popular through the years?

4. What does Jonathan Swift satirize with Gulliver's trip to Lilliput?

5. What is Jonathan Swift trying to do by making Gulliver tiny relative to the Brobdingnagians?

6. What does Jonathan Swift ridicule by having Gulliver go to Laputa?

7. How does Jonathan Swift comment on the common desire to live forever?

8. What message about humanity does Jonathan Swift imply in his description of the Yahoos?

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Gulliver's Travels

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. Why is the period in which Jonathan Swift wrote called "The Age of Reason?"
The period in which Swift wrote is called "The Age of Reason" because travel and scientific discoveries were providing Europeans with astonishing information about the larger world.

2. What was Jonathan Swift's position on the question of the essence of human nature?
Jonathan Swift questioned the belief that man is a purely rational being. He did not accept the idea that man could rise above his nature and live a life of pure reason.

3. Why has Gulliver's Travels proved so popular through the years?
Gulliver's Travels has been popular through the years because it can be read on many levels—as a children's book, as a traveler's tale, and as a great satire.

4. What does Jonathan Swift satirize with Gulliver's trip to Lilliput?
Through the ridiculous politicians of Lilliput, Jonathan Swift pokes fun at the British political system and politicians of his day.

5. What is Jonathan Swift trying to do by making Gulliver tiny relative to the Brobdingnagians?
By changing Gulliver's perspective, Jonathan Swift encourages us to see the world from a different angle, to understand what it feels like to be small and helpless before the forces of the world.

6. What does Jonathan Swift ridicule by having Gulliver go to Laputa?
In the voyage to Laputa, Jonathan Swift satirizes what he saw as the tendency of the scientists of his day to separate reason from common sense.

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7. How does Jonathan Swift comment on the common desire to live forever?
Jonathan Sift shows us the Struldbrugs who lived forever but who continued to age. They were not wonderful, noble, immortal creatures, but essentially senile beings who had to endure. For them, it was the worst sort of torture.

8. What message about humanity does Jonathan Swift imply in his description of the Yahoos?
By telling us of the Yahoos, Jonathan Swift implies that there is a depraved and cruel monster in all of us that must be kept under control.

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